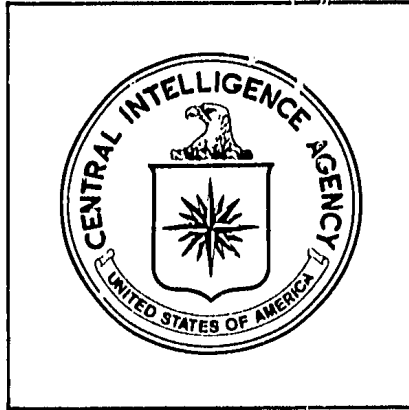


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~~SECRET~~Malagasy Republic*Military Tribunal's Verdict Announced*

The verdict of a military tribunal hearing the case of 33 defendants accused of complicity in the assassination last February of head of state Richard Ratsimandrava will probably keep alive the ethnic tensions that have troubled Madagascar since January.

The tribunal on June 12 found only three of the defendants guilty and sentenced them to five years hard labor and heavy fines. Those acquitted include former president Tsiranana, socialist party leader Andre Resampa, and Colonel Brechard Rajaonarison, who led the revolt of a paramilitary police unit in January. About 200 other defendants were granted amnesty in May.

Almost all the defendants are members of coastal tribes, the traditional rivals of the Merina tribe of central Madagascar. Despite the absence of hard evidence linking the bulk of the defendants to the assassination, many Merina are likely to believe that coastal members of the ruling military directory, established after Ratsimandrava's assassination, used behind-the-scenes influence to secure the release of most of the accused.

The 18-member directory, which includes representatives of the main tribal groups and all security forces, is expected soon to establish a new government and name a single head of government. The primary task of the new government will be to find ways to dampen the ethnic antagonisms that threaten to create a serious split between the coastal-dominated gendarmerie and the Merina-dominated army. It will also have to deal with a sluggish economy and food shortages that have led to high prices in the capital, Tananarive, where most Merina live.

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Commander Didier Ratsiraka, a coastal tribesman and the leader of the directory's radical faction, is the most likely choice to become head of government. He has support among both the coastals and the Merina, although some Merina believe he was primarily responsible for the tribunal's favorable treatment of the coastal defendants. Another contender is Major Soja, a gendarmerie officer who is more moderate than Ratsiraka. He is currently minister of rural development.

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Pakistan

Status of Tarbella Project

Repair work on Pakistan's massive Tarbella dam is ahead of schedule, and water may be available from the dam to irrigate the rice and cotton crops late this summer and the next winter wheat crop in the fall.

Tarbella is not likely to bring self-sufficiency in foodgrain to Pakistan for several years. Farmers in the Indus Valley will have to develop the skills for the more intensive cultivation Tarbella waters will make possible. An increase in the next winter wheat crop depends on use of high-yield varieties, which in turn require a controlled water supply and the careful application of fertilizer and pesticides. Stocks of high-yield seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides are inadequate for the 9-million-ton harvest Islamabad has targeted.

Squabbling among the provinces has interfered with planning the use of Tarbella waters. A top-level committee is working on a plan for allocating the waters, but we are not certain when, or even if, a decision will be made. Under these circumstances, the next winter wheat crop is not likely to be more than 10 percent greater than the last crop.

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